

WALNUT BASIN ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION & PROTECTION FEASIBILITY STUDY

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BACKGROUND

Undisturbed riparian habitat (trees, grasses and brush) once existed along the banks of over 600 primary watercourse miles within the Walnut Basin. Today, riparian habitat is significantly decreased and losses are still occurring.

Within the 2,000 square mile basin, roughly half of the wetlands, riparian corridors, and in-stream habitat present before settlement have been lost. The quality of in stream aquatic habitat is also declining.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that Kansas has lost more than 400,000 acres of its wetlands. That's nearly one half the State's wetlands. The vast majority of wetland losses have occurred since 1950.

The Walnut River Basin is typical of these findings. The Walnut Basin includes the majority of Butler and Cowley Counties, and small portions of Marion, Harvey, Sedgwick, Sumner and Elk Counties.

The Kansas Water Office (KWO) has entered into an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Tulsa District, to begin a Walnut River Basin Ecosystem Restoration and Protection Feasibility Study. The feasibility phase of the study is 50/50 cost share between the State and Corps. This year's Federal budget included \$200,000 for the Walnut Basin Study.

The Kansas Water Office is looking to local landowners, County Conservation Districts, and Watershed Districts in the Walnut Basin as well as the state's natural resource agencies for information and advice.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this two- year study is to help the State assess and address water quality, bank erosion and sediment loads and aquatic species and habitat.

The project will examine riparian and wetland protection and restoration needs in the Basin. The feasibility study will coordinate with ongoing State Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) efforts when possible to develop alternatives and solutions to water quality concerns in the basin, such as use of best management practices.

THE STUDY TEAM

Acceptance and support of this study by local landowners is key to the success of the study and to future implementation of best management practices.

A team of local landowners in the Walnut Basin has been established and will assist the State's Water and Natural Resource Agencies and the Corps focus on landowner needs and interests, and support the public involvement effort.

The study team will work closely with these local landowners to help identify well established and functioning riparian and wetland areas in the basin that are in need of preservation and protection. The study team will also identify degraded riparian and wetland priority areas for restoration.

This study will help address the Kansas Water Plan 2010 objectives on wetland and riparian management and water quality.

STUDY COMPLETION

When the feasibility study is completed in two years, a final report will identify riparian and wetland needs in the Walnut Basin and then make recommendations on implementing high priority Riparian and Ecosystem Restoration Projects in the Basin.

The feasibility phase does not obligate the State to go forward with implementation measures. All recommendations from the feasibility stage will be based on voluntary, incentive based and locally supported approaches to addressing the identified priority issues.

Local involvement and support is considered the cornerstone of this exciting effort to preserve and restore streams and riparian and wetland areas in the Walnut Basin. These efforts should also greatly improve water quality in the Basin.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Further information on this subject or on many other *Kansas Water Plan* related programs can be obtained from: Kansas Water Office, 901 S. Kansas Avenue, Topeka, KS 66612-1249, phone (785-296-3185), toll free (888-KAN-WATER) or check out WEB site at www.kwo.org.

Walnut Basin

